# Police, politics, and the right to the city

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**Abstract**

Space and spatiality have recently been at the core of debates concerning the political possibilities of the city. The arguments advanced in this paper might be seen as an attempt to contribute to these debates through a reflection on the spatiality of (in) justice, politics, and the right to the city. The case of French urban policy, with its focus on distressed urban areas, and the 'suburban problem' in France are used as examples to make arguments more concrete.

## Introduction

French urban policy was launched in the early 1980s following a series of incidents in the peripheral areas of some large French cities. It consisted of several measures which were then regrouped under the generic name *la politique de la Ville* (PV, hereafter) in 1988. Conceived as the 'spatialization of social policies', the objective of the urban policy program was to identify and intervene in 'neighborhoods in difficulty' ('*quartiers en difficulté*'), most of which were located in the *banlieues*. The French suburb (*banlieue*) has different characteristics than the American suburb, and connotes distressed social conditions like American inner-city areas. Located in peripheral urban areas, most with deteriorating public housing, suburbs have been a constant issue on the public agenda, especially since the early 1980s.

Suburbs have also been the major focus of urban policy programs, being a priority issue for successive governments since the early-1980s. They have been constituted as objects of intervention under urban policy, which was based on the spatial delimitation and designation of 'neighborhoods in difficulty' or 'priority neighborhoods'. My aim in this paper is to problematize this spatial conceptualization, and to argue that such a spatial focus is a narrow one that overlooks larger dynamics, and that it has significant political implications for the inhabitants living in designated intervention areas. In advancing these arguments, I will try to demonstrate that the major source of the problems in such designated areas lies in the economic crisis of the early-1970s and economic restructuring processes of the following two decades. I will then examine the discursive articulation of designated areas as problems, and try to point to the political implications of such articulations. Before doing these, however, a brief explanation about the origins and major features of urban policy might be helpful to provide some background.

## French urban policy

The origins of urban policy go back to the first Housing and Social Life plan of 1977 (*Habitat et vie sociale*, HVS), which was originally conceived to address the problems of large social housing estates (*grands ensembles*) built in the 1960s, showing signs of degradation in the 1970s. The *grand ensemble* was a quick, cheap, and large-scale response to address the housing problem in the post-war urbanization period. They were built mostly at the peripheries of cities where land was available and cheap. They definitely contributed to the improvement of the lives of many families with their large surfaces, central heating and bathrooms and toilets. These housing estates initially did not accommodate poor groups; rather, they had inhabitants with stable incomes. By the end of the 1960s, each city, regardless of its size, had at least one neighborhood composed of such housing estates (Jaillet, 2000).

These neighborhoods, however, were far from the city centers, and under-equipped. Most of them suffered from the lack of adequate public transportation, shops, social amenities, and physical degradation due largely to the use of cheap construction materials and rapid construction techniques. The housing finance reform of 1977 (*aide à la personne*, APL) gave push to middle class populations, who were growing more and more dissatisfied by the living conditions in these areas. The main objective of this reform was to facilitate owner-occupied housing. Those having the financial means took advantage of this reform, and moved out from these areas. They were replaced by socio-economically weaker groups – groups with unstable resources and/or immigrants, who were hardly welcome by the property market in the city. Moreover, rising unemployment exacerbated the problems in these areas, which would then, as we will see below, become the 'priority neighborhoods' of urban policy. An inter-ministerial committee for housing and social life,

the HVS, was established in 1977 in order to address these emerging problems. Fifty sites were chosen, and the main concern was with housing renovation. The degradation of the social housing stock (HLM), therefore, was the main concern of the 1977 HVS program, which sought to address the problems in these areas through physical amelioration. The HVS program, however, was

> *too centralized, implying neither local elected representatives nor inhabitants, content often with redoing a 'new skin' to buildings without really ameliorating the comfort of living conditions, and with extra 'coloring' of the facades, which increase the growing or already affirmed stigma from which these neighborhoods suffer* (Jaillet, 2000, p. 31).

It is also possible to point to the limits of the HVS program by focusing on its spatial conception. The program not only identified problems with a narrow spatial focus, but proposed solutions as well. The deterioration of the HLM stock was only one side of a complex problem however, which had to be addressed in ways that went beyond an exclusive focus on physical amelioration. A more global approach was needed.

The inception of urban policy was not merely a recognition of the limits of the HVS program, and an attempt to overcome them by increasing the extent of policies to include social issues as well. Urban policy was conceived following the incidents of social unrest in the summer of 1981 – referred to as 'hot summer' – that took place in the suburbs of Lyons, a few months after the arrival of the Socialist government to power. These suburbs had a huge social housing stock, and contained a large proportion of foreign population and second generation immigrants.

The first program, Social Development of Neighborhoods, started in 1982. It was conceived as an experimental program, with a limited number of sites. Initially 16 neighborhoods were selected for this first phase of urban policy. The particular spatial conceptualization of urban policy had thus started. That is, neighborhoods were spatially delineated and designated as having problems; it was assumed that solutions to the perceived problems lay neatly in the designated area.

The number of neighborhoods were raised to 23 the following year, and to 148 in 1984. Towards the end of the decade, and in the early-1990s, urban policy was institutionalized with an assignment of a minister, who was to address a problem officially defined as 'exclusion'; the number of neighborhoods included was raised to 546. It is also in this period that the term 'sensitive neighborhoods' ('*quartiers sensibles*') appeared to designate the priority neighborhoods of urban policy; 'sensitive' because they, allegedly, constituted a threat to public order. The neighborhoods with 'bad reputation' of the early years of urban policy became 'menaces' (Estèbe, 1999), shifting from being neighborhoods 'in difficulty' or 'in danger' to 'dangerous neighborhoods' (Bonelli, 2001). The spatial imagery, in this process, remained the same, based on the delimitation of neighborhoods mostly in suburbs. Today, there are some 1,300 neighborhoods spatially delimited and designated as the 'priority neighborhoods' of urban policy programs.

Despite changing governments, initiation of new measures (such as enterprise zones since 1996), numerous reports, dozens of acronyms to designate urban policy programs, and millions spent, three things remained the same in the two decades of urban policy. First, the spatial conceptualization of problems remained unchanged, and based on the delimitation and designation of neighborhoods, mostly in the suburbs. Second, although urban policy was announced as a priority issue for governments both from the Left and the Right, its achievements remained rather modest with regard to its announced ambitions and high publicity. And finally, incidents of social unrest in the suburbs continued, and even increased.

What changed was the discursive articulation of the suburb, where most of the priority neighborhoods of urban policy were located. The priority neighborhoods of urban policy were qualified with names such as 'neighborhoods in difficulty', 'sensitive neighborhoods', 'neighborhoods of exile', 'outlaw zones', and 'gray zones' – a term which, before being used to designate suburbs, was used by intelligence services to designate uncontrolled regions in the Amazon that were used by producers and dealers of cocaine (Collovald, 2001, p. 108; fn.30). This constant discursive articulation of the suburb resulted in the consolidation of an image of the suburb as a 'threat', closely associated with a feeling of insecurity and a fear of immigration (Rey, 1999). This image has also been accompanied by a discourse on the 'malaise' and 'crisis' of suburbs. 'Malaise of suburbs', 'suburbs in crisis', and 'suburban crisis' have become commonly used terms to talk about suburbs, both in the media (see, for example, Bonelli, 2001; Collovald, 2001; Macé, 2002), and in the policy discourse (see, for example, Laplanche-Servigne, 1993; Baudin and Genestier, 2002). Thus, starting in the 1980s, the suburb – in crisis – has constantly been represented, both in the urban policy discourse and the media,[1] as the city's Other that, as Mitterrand once put it, lacked 'order and urbanity'.

## The 'Suburban Crisis'

But does the 'suburban crisis' exist in France? It is possible, I believe, to answer the question in the negative, that the so-called suburban crisis does not exist as such, and this for two reasons. The first is simply because the suburb does not exist as such, and second, the 'crisis', if there is one, is a larger social and spatial one. Asserting that something that has been one of the major preoccupations of policy-makers and the larger public for two decades does not exist demands, reasonably, some explanation.

What is at issue is the larger city-region and not simply the suburb. What is at issue, in other words, is a form of spatialization that renders certain areas and their inhabitants socio-economically and politically vulnerable. Not only the neighborhoods of the urban policy program, but also their cities have been the most dramatically touched areas of the restructuring processes of the early 1980s. What one

observes in these neighborhoods is a sharp inequality compared to their surrounding city-regions. There is good reason to believe that there are structural reasons for such inequalities. For the 1990–1999 period, for example, the level of unemployment in the 'priority neighborhoods' of the urban policy program increased three times more (from 18.9% to 25.4%) than the level of unemployment for the rest of the country (from 10.8% to 12.8%), despite the fact that these neighborhoods have been the object of policy interventions for a decade or even more in many cases. Furthermore, it is quite curious to see the same neighborhoods in the 'priority neighborhoods' lists of the PV; the list has practically remained the same since the early 1990s, with certain neighborhoods being included since the early 1980s. The reasons for such increases in unemployment are no secret. The economic crisis following the oil crisis in the 1970s was influential in rising unemployment rates. The major change, however, was brought by the intense economic restructuring processes of the 1980s and 1990s, which translated into sharp declines in the manufacturing sector after the relocation of firms in parts of the world that were economically more profitable. There were 4.6 million people employed in the manufacturing sector (construction not included) in France in 1989, and half a million of these jobs were lost from 1989 to 1994 (OECD, 1998). This trend was aggravated even further with technological advances and the development of new service sectors, increasing the demand for more skilled labor than was already available following the losses in the manufacturing sector. Many working class quartiers, most of which today are urban policy's priority quartiers, were hit severely by unemployment ensuing largely from plant closures in manufacturing and industrial sectors.

The problems that most of the inhabitants of suburb face are not problems of the suburb, because the larger societal problems of racism and xenophobia go well beyond the confines of the suburb. The spatial confinement of 'the problem' (i.e. suburban crisis), I believe, conceals the structural dynamics of the city-region and larger societal problems.

I would like to argue, furthermore, that the suburban *crisis* does not exist. Crisis is a notion that claims exceptionality. The dissensus of the inhabitants of certain suburbs (with one fourth – or even more – of the active population unemployed) where incidents of social unrest occurred, it might be held, has nothing exceptional except, perhaps, the ways in which dissensus is manifested (e.g. setting cars on fire), which no longer surprises anyone[2]. It is, therefore, possible to suspect that the exceptional quality of the term crisis has been used to legitimize repressive measures taken towards the suburb[3], and that the question, in fact, is a question of alterity, of a confrontation of different, and often times antagonistic, identities, which is the very feature of *everyday* urban life. If I am correct in this interpretation, it is possible to argue that the PV has functioned largely as a policy of containment; first, by legitimizing repressive measures and surveillance techniques[4], and second, by turning political claims into disturbances. In other words, by turning *voices into noises*. And this displacement of dissensus owes much to the hegemony of a consensual ideology, to a blend of French republicanism and neo-liberal urbanism (see, for example, Estèbe, 2001).

The question "Does the 'suburban crisis' exist in France?" is not merely a rhetorical question. It is possible to answer the question in the negative through a different conception of space and politics, and through taking into consideration processes, rather than focusing exclusively on forms. When seen from this perspective, the question ceases to be one of 'crisis of the suburb' *as such*, and becomes, rather, a question of injustice produced *and* reproduced by social and spatial dynamics. The question, in other words, becomes one of the structural dynamics of domination and oppression with the production of space at its core.

My argument thus far has been that this particular spatialization with distressed areas in the suburbs is yet another manifestation of the uneven geographies of capitalism, sustaining, if not increasing, inequalities between areas that are considered to be in crisis and their larger city-regions. In the following section, I will consider the political implications of this exclusive focus on the suburb as such, which has resulted in the articulation of the suburb as 'threat' both in the media and the policy discourse. I will try to argue that this process, eventually, has led to the 'spatialization of the Other', depriving the inhabitants of certain areas of their rights to the city in the political sense of the term.

## Police, politics, and de-politicization

What, then, are the political consequences of this exclusive focus on deprived areas? How, if the assertion is correct, are the inhabitants living in these areas deprived of their political rights to the city? In what follows, I will offer one possible interpretation based on the political thought of Jacques Rancière.

The focus of French urban policy, as I have tried to illustrate above, has always been explicitly on the suburbs, and the problem it was supposed to tackle was defined as 'exclusion'. Its focus, in other words, has always been on 'the excluded'. What is important here is not to overlook the fact that an explicit focus on the excluded, on the part that does not 'fit in', implies an assumption about the 'whole'. The implicitly recognized whole stands for the norm. A whole to be divided (included and excluded), therefore, assumes that it meaningfully exists. This imaginary whole reflects a peculiar idea of society. The fact that it is imaginary, however, does not mean that it is without consequences; it is a representation – a very powerful one – with practical effects:

> *The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas* (Douglas, 1984 [1966], p. 115).

I will call this symbolic whole, following Rancière, *the police*, not to refer to repressive forces but rather to refer, using the original meaning of the word, to the order of things, of

the city – *the polis*. The police, therefore, refers to the established social order with a process of governing. It refers, in other words, to "*a natural order of things where a society is represented as being divided into functions, into places where these functions are exercised, into groups which are, by virtue of their places, bound for exercising this or that function*". It is "*a structuring of the common space*", fixing at once a common space and its exclusive parts, which makes forms of domination appear as if they are founded on a sensible and obvious system. It is a symbolic constitution of the social, and implies "*an organic vision of the society*" (Rancière, 2000, p. 215). Even politics, in this spatial ordering, has its proper place.

This, however, is not politics, Rancière argues; it simply is confusing politics with the police. There is politics, he maintains, as soon as one leaves "*the reference to an organicity of the society or to a naturality of the exercise of the government, the dividing up of places and powers*" (2000, p. 215). Politics has no place in this organic order; it always comes as a surplus to the saturated police order. It is the revocation of the very idea that partitioned spaces correspond to partitioned functions, groups, and powers.

Politics proper, therefore, implies a disruption of the police order. One of the ways in which the police avoids the disturbance of politics is to name phenomena and to assign them to their 'proper places' in the established order, and therefore, de-politicize them. And this is exactly what the PV does by focusing on the suburb. The (excluded) suburb is included in the police order: They are the excluded. The suburb legitimizes intervention: Those are the neighborhoods in crisis. Nothing, in fact, escapes the police – especially the 'excluded'. The excluded is now included; the boundaries have been fixed.

Why, then, is this distinction between the police and politics? What is the democratic theme in this particular conception of politics? The democratic theme is *not* that the police order can be all inclusive. For Rancière, this is not possible. Every order will have its remainders. The democratic theme is to re-define the whole and to speak for this whole; it is making a claim to *be* the whole, not to be *included* in the whole. The democratic theme is *not* the inclusion of the excluded; it is the posture of the redefinition of the whole and its modes of governance and partitioning. Such a posture makes necessary the following two features as to the nature of politics and the police.

First, politics cannot be institutionalized. It is a call of the *demos* for a new institutionalization. And second, the police has to be non-pejorative since any redefinition of the whole with a process of governing will inevitably lead to the reconstitution of another police order, 'good' or 'bad'. The police, in other words, is not intrinsically 'bad'. There are, however, practices of policing.

Going back to the example of inclusion/exclusion: in Rancière's approach, this is not a question of politics; it is about alterations in a police order. 'The inclusion of the excluded' is the wrong way to think *politically* about the issue; even, for example, exclusion from formal power is a form of inclusion in the police order (e.g., women and slaves in the Greek polis). Politics, therefore, is not about identifying the 'excluded' and trying to include them. The logic of identification belongs to the police. Politics is not, furthermore, about the negotiation of interests by the already identified groups. Politics proper is to question the 'given' order of the police that seems to be the 'natural' order of things, to question the whole and its partitioned spaces, and to verify the equality of any speaking being to any other speaking being (Rancière, 1999).

From this point of view, it is possible to argue that French urban policy, through the spatial delimitation of 'neighborhoods in crisis', displaces dissensus in the police order. First, its exclusive focus on the suburb effaces the synthetically partitioned nature of the whole, and leaves the whole unquestioned (it is the suburb that is in 'crisis', the rest is fine). It thus avoids addressing fundamental antagonisms that are constitutive of the very society and its spaces. Distressed areas – the remainders – are constituted as objects of intervention, objects that seem merely as external to the production processes of urban space. Second, and more importantly, the suburb now has its place in the 'natural' order of things; it is a place from where could only come noises. Things, in other words, happen 'there'; recurrent incidents of social unrest in the French suburbs no longer surprise anyone. What happens in the suburbs no longer sound like voices evoking some form of injustice, but merely as noises coming from their 'proper' places. The excluded is included in the order, with a rigid distinction between 'here' (the City) and 'there' (the suburb).

This is the spatial logic behind the PV: it leaves no room for the blurring of boundaries, for 'in-between's since it is guided by a rigid logic of 'here' and 'there'. And this logic can be seen as an attempt to avoid the disturbance of politics through the configuration of certain places – in this case the suburb – as places of noise. The challenge, then, becomes the securing of the order. Transformations in French urban policy in the early 1990s, in this sense, may be exemplary.

The 1990s were marked by the 'return of the State' with the passing of many ambitious laws concerning urban policy (of which the LOV of 1991, known as the 'anti-ghetto' law, was one). Despite attempts to extend the geographical extent of urban policy, the focus still was on neighborhoods showing signs of distress. The Delarue Report was published in 1991, putting distressed neighborhoods under the lens again. Delarue's diagnostic was that these neighborhoods were not only 'in crisis' or 'in difficulty'; they were relegation neighborhoods[5]. The concern, though not always explicitly stated, was "restoring the 'republican order' in places that might become 'outlaw' ['*hors droit*'] neighborhoods" (Jaillet, 2000, p. 35). This concern, in fact, was evident in the famous speech of President Mitterrand at Bron on 4 December, 1990.[6] Mitterrand stated that "*it was possible to design, in this hideous jumble [magma] of suburbs of big cities, an order, an urbanism, an aesthetics, a way of life, and maybe a hope*" (emphases added).

Mitterrand was convinced that suburbs, products of State post-war urban planning, were places where 'disorder reigned'. It was the task of the State to bring order and

urbanity to these areas. Moreover, 'a new dramaturgy of neighborhoods' had appeared, due largely to the media coverage of incidents of social unrest, "*justifying the call to return to security and public order*" (Jaillet, 2000, p. 39).

The answer of the French Intelligence Service was to establish a special section on 'Cities and Suburbs' in 1991 that would specialize in 'urban violence'. Two points, at least, are important here. First, the creation of a special section at the French Intelligence Service, Mitterrand's Bron speech, creation of a City Ministry, assignment of prefects to certain regions as the local arms of the central state, and Delarue's 1991 report on suburbs in difficulty as 'relegation neighborhoods' were seemingly all motivated by the incidents of social unrest at the Mas du Taureau neighborhood, Vaulx-en-Velin in the suburbs of Lyons, in October 1990.

But there was more to the early 1990s. There was a zealous effort to restore the republican order, guided by a concern about security because 'there' was now 'here'; incidents of social unrest were not confined to the suburbs. What was decisive in this 'return of the State' in the early 1990s was the recognition of this fact during the manifestation of high school students in November 1990 in Paris, which ended up with confrontations with the police. The report of Julien Dray, presented at the National Assembly following the incidents, is telling in this respect. The report is entitled *Violence of Young People in the Suburbs*, which was, in Dray's words, was 'born out of a shock during the manifestations of high school students in the Fall of 1989'. Dray, therefore, prepares his report on violence of young people *in the suburbs* by referring to the incidents that took place not in the suburbs but in the middle of Paris (which, in fact, took place not in 1989 but in 1990). The conviction was that it was the young people coming from the suburbs to Paris that caused the incidents during the manifestations. 'They' were now 'here'. This is what was shocking: 'there' was 'here'; the Other out there was threatening the Same here.

These examples, I believe, might be seen as indicative of the ways in which the inhabitants of certain areas are deprived of their right to the city in the political sense of the term through a particular configuration of space – both discursively and concretely. The suburb and its inhabitants have been assigned to their 'proper' places in the police order – in the symbolically constituted social imaginary – as places of noise. The challenge for the state, in this sense, is to secure this order through the effective containment of certain spaces and groups therein, which mostly consist of immigrants and/or people of immigrant extraction.

I would like to argue, however, that the challenge, rather than looking at the malaise of suburbs and to recognize the City as the Same on seeing its Other, is to look at the very city *in its totality*, at the very society and its space to discover the suburb and to problematize the city. The suburb is not self-contained; its spaces and social relations are not produced in a vacuum. And conceiving the city in its totality is as important as recognizing its diversity.

In this sense, the problem with the PV is that it does not focus on the 'spatiality *of* problems' (i.e. spatial dynamics and processes that produce and/or reproduce problems); it, rather, turns the question into 'problems *in* space' and 'problem spaces', and delimits certain areas and fixes identities in space. The 'fixation of identities in space' means that inhabitants of the designated areas are identified by where they live; that is, where they live becomes determinant (often in a negative way) of their identities. The PV, in other words, *spatializes the Other*. The attempt, I believe, must be to consider how particular forms of spatialization engender and maintain problems, and not merely to identify 'problem spaces'. The PV's spatial focus, therefore, is narrow in the sense that rather than taking into consideration larger spatial dynamics, it delimits certain spaces as if they are points in space, external to the workings of the larger urbanization processes, waiting to be discovered. Such a narrow spatial focus not only ignores larger dynamics of the social production of space and of social relations, but also conceals deep socio-political problems – such as racism and xenophobia – under space. In other words, deep societal problems are reduced to spatial problems with a Cartesian, static conception of space, neglecting not only social, but spatial dynamics as well.

Spatial strategies, then, may be effective ideological tools for the 'right' order of the police. For this very reason, it is necessary, perhaps, to take space seriously in emancipatory political projects. I would like to conclude by considering some possibilities for imagining spatially conscious politics.

## Conclusions: Urban spatial sensibilities[7]

The idea of the city has recently instigated a considerable body of literature seeking to think spatially about questions of citizenship, democracy, politics, and (in)justice. It is possible to observe that the current debates around urbanism are structured by issues and concerns that were not, until recently, at the core. Four such issues may easily be discerned in the literature. The list, however, is not exhaustive. The attempt, rather, is to point to certain issues that have not until recently been – although their importance were acknowledged implicitly or explicitly – at the core of debates around 'the urban question'.

The *first* one of these issues is the recognition of the role space and spatiality plays. The effects of this recognition in the field of geography have been immense, quickly disseminating across a variety of disciplines from anthropology (see, for example, Low, 1996) to political science (see, for example, Magnusson, 1996; Young, 1990, 1999). The most widely observed paradigm of this 'spatial turn' is the social constructivist approach to space, with the recognition of the socio-spatial dialectic; that is, a conception of space produced through social relationships, which, in turn, constitutes those very relationships (Gregory and Urry, 1985; Harvey, 1989b; Lefebvre, 1991[1974]; Soja, 1989, 1996).

The *second* issue involves a concern with justice and the various forms of injustice inherent in the workings of the capitalist city (Harvey, 1973, 1996; Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1997; Smith, 1994; Soja, 2000; Dikeç, 2001).

Such a concern engenders a *third* issue; that is, considering emancipatory projects informed by a politics of space and the (re)construction of the city as a terrain of spatially informed politics (Lefebvre, 1977; Massey, 1999; Keith, 1997). Formation of political identities and deliberations on democracy accompany such projects (Keith and Pile, 1993; Massey, 1995; Tajbakhsh, 2001).

*Finally*, there has been a considerable attempt to reconsider citizenship with a shift in focus from the state to the city, reconceptualizing the city as a privileged site for the formation and practice of citizenship rights (Holston and Appadurai, 1996; Isin, 2000; Staeheli, 1999).

The common thread running through these debates is what I would like to refer to as the development of an *urban spatial sensibility*, and the emancipatory political projects it inspires. The development of such a sensibility generates possibilities for spatially conscious politics in fighting against injustice – understood as domination and oppression – and the following formulation is one such possibility informed by three notions: right to the city, right to difference, and the spatial dialectics of injustice.

The major premise is that (in)justice has a spatial dimension to it, and that this dimension should be conceived dialectically, focusing not merely on forms but, more importantly, on processes as well. In other words, the very production of space not only manifests various forms of injustice, but actually produces *and* reproduces them (maintaining, therefore, established relations of domination and oppression). The emphasis on processes does not imply that distributional issues are unimportant. It should rather be seen as a critique of the tendency to reduce social justice to distributional issues.

A *spatial dialectics of injustice* may be conceived to address this issue, with two notions: *spatiality of injustice* and *injustice of spatiality*. While the former notion implies that justice has a spatial dimension to it, and therefore, that a spatial perspective might be used to discern injustice *in space*, the latter puts emphasis on established structures in their capacities to produce and reproduce injustice *through space.* The emphasis, therefore, is not on space *per se*, but the processes that produce space, and, at the same time, the implications of these produced spaces on relations of domination and oppression. The basic features of the dialectical formulation are, therefore, as follows:

- focusing on spatiality as a process; as a producer and reproducer of, at the same time being produced and reproduced by, relatively stable structures;
- recognizing the interrelatedness of injustice and spatiality as producing, reproducing, and sustaining each other through a mediation of larger permanences that give rise to both of them.

Two more notions need to be mentioned: the right to the city and the right to difference. The right to the city implies not only a right to urban space, but to a political space as well, with the participation of all city residents. The merit of the notion, however, does not derive principally from the idea of formal participation. Its merit, in other words, does not lie in an increase in the number of those who participate in the affairs of the city. It rather lies in its potential to generate a peculiar relationship to the political order of things by constituting the city as a space of politics. What this implies is a departure from and resistance to the state as the primary agent for the construction of political identities and as the principal site for political struggle. What is promising about the notion, therefore, is not a straightforward proliferation of formal participants, but, rather, the very possibility of the formation of voices, of political subjectivization it generates in and around urban space.

The right to difference is complementary to the right to the city. What it implies is a right to resistance, and *not* an exclusive focus on difference *as particularity*. The right to be different, as Lefebvre (1976, p. 35) wrote, is "*the right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by the necessarily homogenizing powers*". It is a right to politics that questions the order of things. To put it in the language of police and politics, following Ranciére, it implies – as a right to politics – not the simple affirmation of an identity, but rather, a dis-identification denying the identity imposed by the police order.

A notion of *spatial justice* might serve as a mobilizing discourse through the cultivation of a spatial sensibility toward injustice, and a spatial culture to fight against it through claiming these two rights. Besides, it helps one to distinguish between decidedly individualistic and collective interpretations of these rights, between appropriation and domination of urban space in the name of a right to the city and difference. Finally, it calls into question the relationship between spatiality and the formation of rights claims and their practice.

But what is the nature of this notion? Let me proceed by stating what it is not: it is not a programmatic definition, a procedure or a state program. In other words, 'spatial justice' is not an end, however defined, to be achieved. As Badiou (1999, p. 29) wrote, "*[i]njustice is not the immediate disorder of which justice would be the ideal order*". The notion makes spatially conscious politics possible through addressing particular 'wrongs' engendered and sustained by spatial dynamics. In other words, it helps, as a properly political notion, to *wrong* the 'right' order of the police. The notion of spatial justice, therefore, may be seen as a critique of systematic domination and oppression produced and sustained by particular forms of spatialization; a critique aimed at cultivating new sensibilities towards forms of injustice rooted in space and spatial dynamics.

I have tried to demonstrate how French urban policy defines – if not explicitly – a symbolic whole and tries to identify problem spaces that do not fit in that whole, rendering the already economically vulnerable inhabitants of these areas politically vulnerable as well. The particular politics that I have offered using the triad of spatial dialectics of injustice, right to the city, and right to difference suggests that the challenge is not to identify *the* problem because the whole things is a 'problem'; the city produces, and in turn is produced, by an ensemble of social relations and spatial dynamics. Far from such an attitude, the French state, especially in the last ten years or so, has tended to conceptualize

the problem as a question of security[8], identifying 'points in space' and devising containment policies for them. The question, however, might be – and in my opinion should be – conceptualized as a question of justice with a spatial sensitivity towards injustice – with an attempt, in other words, to see the spatial dimension of injustice and *wrong* the 'right' order of the police.

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**Notes**

[1]A recent series of articles in *Libération* (8 April, 2002) under the rubric "The French, are they afraid of everything?" listed the suburb as one of the fears of the French, among other fears such as terrorism and AIDS.
[2]Even as early as 1983, an article appeared in *Le Monde* (6 August) on "series of violence in large public housing estates" [*grands ensembles*]: "[W]e lost count of violent incidents in certain neighborhoods".
[3]See, for example, a recent article that appeared in *Le Monde* (20 April, 2002) on the increase in abusive police controls in "sensitive neighborhoods" [*quartiers sensibles*] with the subtitle "a targeted repression".
[4]A section called 'Cities and Suburbs' was created as part of the French Intelligence Service (*Renseignements Généraux*) in 1991.
[5]The report was entitled *Banlieues en difficultés: la relégation*. J. M. Delarue later became the head of the DIV.
[6]Discours prononcé par Monsieur François Mitterrand Président de la République devant les assises de Banlieue 89, Bron, le mardi 4 décembre 1990. Présidence de la République, Service de Presse.
[7]Parts of this section draw from Dikeç (2001).
[8]The new government, following the elections in May 2002, declared that the issue of insecurity would be one of its main concerns.

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